United Nations E/CN.6/2019/NGO/122

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
27 November 2018

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Sixty-third session
11–22 March 2019
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Statement submitted by Coordination Francaise du Lobby Europeen des Femmes, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

18-20329 (E) 191218

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Statement

In the 2016 European Parliament report on poverty, it was noted that there were 64.6 million poor women in Europe compared with 57.6 million men. France, which is justifiably considered to have a well-developed system of social protection and public services, is no exception to that imbalance or its consequences. As elsewhere in Europe, the impediments to women's access to social protection, public services and various types of gender infrastructure are exacerbated by poverty and precarious living conditions: 4.7 million poor women (accounting for 52 per cent of the poor population of France) are relegated to a state of indigence and are socially marginalized. Among them, the following categories are particularly vulnerable: heads of single-parent families, young women, rural women, older women, migrant women, and women from the overseas territories. These categories are particularly affected by displacement and social exclusion. This poverty is not a temporary or marginal phenomenon. It is a structural phenomenon which is becoming increasingly severe in France.

Legal measures and existing incentives to address, for example, pay differentials (from 9 per cent to 24 per cent) at all levels of employment are not put into effect, or are applied only in a limited fashion; the glass ceiling persists year after year; guidance, training and recruitment of women to more varied and more lucrative occupations is not on the agenda; unpaid work (care of children, the sick, and ageing or disabled parents) is not reflected in women's incomes; 72 per cent of household tasks are performed by women on a voluntary basis or under duress; there is no real reciprocity in carrying out these social responsibilities. For women, there is too much involuntary part-time employment, low-level work, temporary work, seasonal employment, unpaid work, unemployment (the unemployment rate for single mothers is 15 per cent compared to an average of 9.6 per cent for all mothers). Women are in the majority among recipients of revenu de solidarite active (RSA) (welfare benefits). In short, the labour market and working conditions are very unfavourable to women.

The austerity policies carried out for many years in France and in Europe have an impact on women. The reduction of public spending threatens social gains and women's work, as they constitute the majority of public sector workers. This is a double penalty, despite half a century of struggle.

Women are still disadvantaged in their career paths because of family responsibilities and the uncertainties of social life (widowhood, illness, divorce, unemployment ... They are victims of male violence, and lack paid and steady employment (departures from the workforce to raise children). Because they pass through periods of insecurity, women have less or inferior access to sexual and reproductive rights (contraception, abortion or assisted reproduction).

They are often solely responsible for their children's education. Unwanted pregnancies, sole parenthood and disability are aggravating factors of impoverishment. The public services for infants are insufficient (not enough nurseries; no access to personal aides). Not to mention women who engage in prostitution in order to support their families. A single-parent family comprises a sole parent with one or more unmarried children: in metropolitan France, 83 per cent of single parents are women, and the figure is 90 per cent in the overseas territories. They often forego care for financial reasons.

They are penalized at retirement: two out of three retired poor are women. The end-of-life conditions of poor single women are deteriorating in France and is a source of increasing concern.

All public services are gradually disintegrating, thereby impairing the enjoyment of rights and citizenship. There is a need to bridge the digital divide of which poor (and older) women are the primary victims.

All these factors are cumulative. They are compounded for overseas and migrant women. From the point of view of migrant women, France is in violation of the international treaties which it has signed (violence, prostitution, exclusion, ghettoization, sexism, racism, extreme poverty ... are the daily lot of migrant women).

On the basis of the United Nations conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Platform for Action, and in order to combat structural impoverishment and the marginalization of a large number of women, which exclude them from public services, social protection and the gender equality infrastructure, the Coordination Française du Lobby Européen des Femmes calls upon States:

- To develop a society of equal responsibility of men and women both at work and within the family.
- To budget for the costs of the design, implementation and gender monitoring of public policies (gender-sensitive budgeting).
- To continue to advocate the production of gender-disaggregated statistics.
- To fund free university research on all these topics.
- To ensure the implementation of affirmative action policies to promote training and education for girls.
- To implement and strengthen existing legislation on the labour market (parity and equal pay)
- To ensure parity, equal pay and recruitment for women with disabilities.
- To address the specific challenges of these women.
- To combat job insecurity, as well as involuntary part-time and unpaid employment of women.
- To upgrade the status of the "caring" professions.
- To enhance women's awareness of the risks of reductions in their pensions after interrupted or incomplete service (paying attention to informal work)
- To expand public services for infants.
- To promote non-transferable parental leave and guarantee the return to work.
- To reduce the digital divide that is contributing to the isolation of many women.
- To establish gender-sensitive policies and procedures on asylum and integration to help women and girls gain access to human rights and autonomy, particularly in the areas of security, health, education, social welfare, justice, etc).
- To ensure equality and continuity of public services and social protection between metropolitan France and the overseas territories.